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INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
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RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI PRIORITY 0225

C O N F I D E N T I A L RIYADH 000110

NOFORN
SIPDIS

DHAHRAN SENDS,
PASS TO NEA/ARP JOSHUA HARIS,
S/CT ERIC RYE, EEB/TRA/OTP DORIS HAYWOOD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/13/2019
TAGS: [ENRG](#) [EPET](#) [EWWT](#) [PHSA](#) [PINS](#) [PTER](#)
SUBJECT: SOMALI PIRATES AND THEIR SUNKEN SAUDI TREASURE

REF: 08 RIYADH 1716

Classified By: CG Joseph A. Kenny for reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

(C/NF) Key Points

-- The hijacked Sirius Star was released on Friday. All crew members were freed unharmed.

-- The Somali pirates allegedly received a ransom payment between \$3 and \$3.5 million for the release of the Sirius Star oil tanker, though no Saudi entity has publicly confirmed the ransom payment.

-- However, Saudi Aramco and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) contacts have privately confirmed to the Embassy and Consulate General Dhahran that a ransom was paid to the pirates by parachuting a package of money onto the deck of the Sirius Star.

-- Four or five pirates drowned) along with their money - when their skiff capsized shortly after receiving their share of the ransom payment; one body reportedly washed onshore with \$153,000 in his pocket.

(C/NF) Comment

-- The SAG, Saudi Aramco and Vela International have not publicly confirmed the payment of a ransom in accordance with the official SAG policy of not negotiating with pirates. Though post is confident that the SAG was ultimately responsible for the decision to pay a ransom, they will likely remain silent with that information.

End key points and comment.

11. (C/NF) The release of the hijacked Sirius Star has widely been reported in the international media. A ransom payment of allegedly between \$3 and \$3.5 million) down from the original \$25 million demanded by the pirates - was parachuted onto the deck of the Sirius Star on Friday, January 9 by a small plane. After dividing the ransom onboard the Sirius Star, the pirates fled in several smaller boats. (Note. A MFA contact said that once the ransom payment landed on the deck of the Sirius Star, the pirates began to fight amongst themselves over the money. End note.)

12. (C/NF) One boat carrying four or five pirates (there have been conflicting media reports on this figure) capsized a short while after leaving the Sirius Star. Two days later it

was widely reported that the body of one of those ill-fated pirates washed onshore with \$153,000 in a plastic bag in his pocket. According to BBC news, only three pirates made it back to the Somali shore alive and none with the Saudi ransom money. Apparently their Saudi treasure sunk to the ocean floor as they swam to shore. Post has not been able to confirm these details. According to a well-placed Aramco employee, the Sirius Star is currently en route to Dubai where Vela International will replace the crew and set sail once again for an undisclosed U.S. refinery.

13. (C/NF) As the news was breaking on Friday (Jan 9), a Saudi Aramco contact told Consul General Kenny that on Wednesday (Jan 7) one of his colleagues was sent to Vela International's headquarters in Dubai without any explanation. Speculation among Aramco personnel was that there was a breakthrough in the negotiations with the pirates and he was sent to keep tabs on its progress. Since the Sirius Star was hijacked in November 2008, Aramco and MFA contacts have explicitly and implicitly confirmed) in private - that the final decision on whether or not to pay a ransom rested with the SAG.

14. (SBU) Since the release of the oil tanker, the SAG, Saudi Aramco and Vela International have all declined to acknowledge the payment of any ransom in a public forum. On Monday, January 12 the Kenyan Foreign Minister publicly condemned the ransom payment made to the hijackers of the Sirius Star, though he fell short of specifically criticizing the SAG.

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